

## **Film 3: Retail & Leisure Quarter**

### **Introduction**

*00:00:04 – 00:00:24*

#### **Alison Woolgar, Principal Projects Surveyor**

We've been working up Masterplan proposals for the Swan Centre to revitalise it as a catalyst to improve the vitality of the High Street. The mix of uses we propose will diversify away from pure retail to include leisure such as a cinema, a hotel, more bars and restaurants, and residential and office spaces.

### **Why are you planning a boutique cinema when we have a fully functioning cinema/theatre in Leatherhead?**

**&**

### **What can be done to retain/support the theatre?**

*00:00:24 – 00:02:58*

#### **Alison Woolgar**

The programme that's at the Leatherhead Theatre is very drama-led and that means that people can't always watch the latest films when they want to watch them and as a result will travel to other towns outside Mole Valley.

#### **Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson, Cabinet Member for Projects**

Can you explain why you think that there is the demand for a cinema then?

#### **Alison Woolgar**

Public feedback that we've had so far has indicated that what people really want in Leatherhead is a branded cinema showing current films. And if they do that they will come into town, they will spend time going to bars and restaurants and it will really contribute to that night-time economy, the vitality of the High Street and indeed is part of the work we've done with the Swan Centre Masterplan.

#### **Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson**

And it doesn't conflict with what the Theatre is offering because they focus on drama and dance and so they can complement each other.

**Alison Woolgar**

Yes, you start to get almost a clustering. It becomes a destination, it becomes where people want to go. They know they can go to Leatherhead to go to the theatre, to go to the cinema, to go to the really nice restaurant etc., etc. It just gets that critical mass and vibrancy that we need that you're not now getting by retail alone.

**Emma Day, Head of Service (Prosperity)**

A question that comes up quite often is what can be done to retain the Leatherhead Theatre and how can it be supported.

**Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson**

Okay, it is a tricky question because Mole Valley District Council doesn't own the theatre, it's privately owned and so in that respect we don't fund it, it has to fund itself. But we do try to help it by sign-posting it to sources of funding as well as doing the improvements that we've done within the Leatherhead town centre. So, improvements of public realm, making sure people know how to get to it, that the signage is all clear. But ultimately the Theatre is there for residents to use and you need to go book and attend the shows they're putting on. That's what we really need to get the message out there.

**Emma Day**

They have a really good varied programme, I follow them on social media and see them regularly posting about their programmes so they could follow them on social media.

**Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson**

Can I do a plug for something? The Freewheelers from North Leatherhead are doing a show, they've invited me along and I am looking forward to it. So let's support local community groups who are using the Theatre which is what we need.

**Alison Woolgar**

I'm looking forward to the Rotary Royal Philharmonic Orchestra as well in May, I went last year and it was packed, it was a sell out, fantastic.

**Emma Day**

And it's a great cause as well.

## **What about the improvements to the Swan Centre and the High Street?**

00:02:58 – 00:07:02

### **Alison Woolgar**

For the Swan Centre we've got a long-term vision, Masterplan, that we've been working on and also some short-term works.

### **Emma Day**

Do you want to touch on the short-term works to start with?

### **Alison Woolgar**

Yes. So, some of the short-term works we've done relate to improvements to the car park that we've already completed. People said they wanted to be able to pay as they leave so we have been trialing a machine at Church Street within the car park there and that has the functionality for contactless and you can pay when you leave. The plan is that we roll those out into the Swan Centre very soon.

### **Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson**

I think I saw that there is an intention to try to get the park mark scheme is that right?

### **Emma Day**

That's right, that's the aspiration. We've got further improvements we would need to achieve in order to obtain that accreditation but it's about making the car park safer and more user-friendly day and night effectively.

### **Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson**

Some of the questions that also came up were about improving the public areas and what can be done to make that nicer, can you give us some ideas?

### **Emma Day**

Ali, correct me if I'm wrong, but we spent quite a lot of time and energy improving the lighting within the Swan Centre car park itself and I think we are looking at trying to improve the overall lighting in the Swan Centre to make it feel more friendly to people using it day and in the evening as well.

### **Alison Woolgar**

And things like better way-finding signage around so it ties in with the new logo, Swan Centre logo, it's more visible from Leret way, it's more visible from the High Street and clearer once you get into the centre where things are.

**Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson**

Obviously there has been a big question mark over what was going to happen to the High Street. We obviously carried out consultations on that and put a proposal to the Surrey County Council [Mole Valley] Local Committee. At the moment they've rejected those proposals and we're going to have to go have another look at what can be done there.

**Emma Day**

So we've touched on the short-term improvements we've been working on, Ali do you want to talk us through the longer term vision for the Swan Centre?

**Alison Woolgar**

So the vision for the Swan Centre in the long-term is to bring a greater mix of uses that will really contribute to the vitality of the High Street.

**Emma Day**

And is that responding to all the changes that are happening in the High Street which are talked about so much nationally, on the BBC, on panorama...?

**Alison Woolgar**

Yes, a move to a more experiential retail, making it a local destination.

**Emma Day**

So we're not looking to attract in the likes of Primark or the big national brands anymore is that right?

**Alison Woolgar**

No, those sorts of brands now they're really cutting back on the number of stores they're having so they're really focusing on the prime towns. What that means for Leatherhead is that those stores will be in places like Woking, Kingston, London, Bluewater and that's where people travel for that kind of shop. Actually what we want for Leatherhead is to cater for the everyday shop but also bring in that leisure so that you start to get those repeat visits, more reasons to go than just to buy.

**Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson**

And some of the independent bespoke shops as well so that we've got other sorts of different offers there.

**Emma Day**

Where you get that local touch.

### **Alison Woolgar**

The beauty actually of the [Swan Centre] Masterplan is that rather than just putting in the great big chain shops, as perhaps might have been assumed 5 years ago when we were at the [Transform Leatherhead] Masterplan stage, the idea now is that to respond to the changes in the market the feedback that we've had from our consultants is that rather than creating bigger units that are very formulaic, every town becomes the same, we should be creating smaller units. That has two benefits, one is that you have smaller units so that they're more affordable and independent occupiers can afford to be there. The other is that actually you create bigger open spaces so that you can start to bring in green spaces, space for events, for pop-ups, for markets and all those things just get people actually interested, they want to come, they want something that's authentic.

### **Emma Day**

And a bit different to every other town.

## **What support is there for small local businesses in terms of courses and training?**

*00:07:02 – 00:08:50*

### **Emma Day**

Mole Valley has an economic prosperity strategy that was approved about two years ago now and we've been working really hard recently to try to put together a package of measures. They range from Digital Skills training which is happening right now. We have courses running in February which are fully booked but we've got some spaces still in March. We're also going to be launching a retail skills training programme really aimed at independents who don't have the backing of the big national brands behind them and that could be touching on merchandising, promotions, customer service, things that we perhaps take for granted. There are programmes for non-retailers as well. Business Hothouse is a University of Chichester delivered program to support SME's - people looking to start up their own business, who have been in business for a little while and are looking to expand - and we're hoping to launch that officially later in 2020.

We're also starting a new series of monthly Networking Lunches, but they will be here at Pippbrook but there will be a range of guest speakers each month and the first one's already fully booked so hopefully it will be popular and well-received.

But I suppose the other thing I wanted to say is not just what Mole Valley can offer. There are lots of other organisations out there ranging from Coast to Capital, to Surrey Chambers, to our own Leatherhead and District Chamber of Trade and they all offer different avenues of support and advice to people wanting to run a business in Mole Valley. Please explore the opportunities that are out there.